

'We don't like ego buildings'

Derwent London knows what it wants for its high-quality niche, says **David Rogers**

Simon Silver finds himself wandering about London carrying out his own assessments of buildings. "You critique every building you walk past," the head of regeneration at Derwent London says. "Sometimes I'm a bit aghast at the planning permissions given."

Now an honorary fellow of the RIBA, his entry into architecture came when he helped found the company in 1984. Pretty much the first job he did was to hire Troughton McAslan to turn a rundown industrial building off Islington's Upper Street into a new studio, now the headquarters of fashion retailer Jacques Vert.

"For me it was a eureka moment," Silver recalls. He vowed to work with design-led practices. "Good is good and it does normally last the test of time. We've always used guys who are talented and know what they're doing. We've always encouraged young practices. We worked with AHMM, Allies & Morrison, Squire & Partners when they had 10 people."

One thing Silver prides himself on is his loyalty to firms. The developer's largest work — the Stirling Prize-nominated 24,600sq m Angel Building in Islington — was carried out by AHMM. "It's one of the best things we've done. BT were at the fag end of a lease. I thought the Angel Building would be pulled down but Simon Allford worked on it before and he said it had a great frame so we entrusted him not to go new build. Why pull a building down if it's got great potential?"

But loyalty doesn't stop him hunting out new practices. Piercy & Co, now working on a 6,500sq m scheme to turn the former Turnmills building in Farringdon into offices and retail, was an Allford recommendation. And the revamp of 151 Rosebery Avenue was carried out by Hugh Broughton Architects, one-time employee of Troughton McAslan, and recommended by McAslan. "What I like about the industry is people aren't afraid to say 'so and so's good'. We see quite a lot of people that way."

With a roster that has included Sergison Bates, Stiff & Trevillion, Duggan Morris and DSDHA, Silver admits Derwent has become a patron of architecture. "We've got our taste in work so we're not shy to say that something's not for us."

What's not for Derwent is greedy, oversized buildings. "We like clean lines — we don't like ego



THE CHANGING DERWENT

In 2007, Derwent Valley Holdings merged with London Merchant Securities to become Derwent London. This gave it a portfolio of 502,000sq m, says Simon Silver (pictured). He adds: "We own a lot of stock that will become a project."

Last month, it acquired two West End buildings on Berners Street, while Rab Bennetts is working on a 9,300sq m new build on the corner of Chancery Lane to finish in 2014.

In 2018 the firm will take 1 Oxford Street back from Crossrail. AHMM is behind this scheme, which is notable for being the West End's first new theatre in more than 30 years.

buildings. We're not a company that builds skyscrapers. We're about modesty of scale," he says.

Derwent has no plans to move out of London. "We're niche and we know what we're bringing. London is enormous; it's not exactly a small place. We haven't done much south of the river."

It has hired Make to work on what will be its largest scheme. Among the 30,000sq m of office space at Charlotte Street will be around 4,600sq m of residential.

Derwent isn't best known for residential, Silver admits, but it worked with Stanton Williams on a scheme at Riverbank House on Millbank. Silver is minded to look at the recent rule changes regarding change of use class but says office stock is too important for councils to see wholesale change.

"If we did residential, our brief would be the same we gave to Stanton Williams," Silver adds.

"Something elegant that looks like an apartment block and not an office. There's so many where you wouldn't really know which was which."

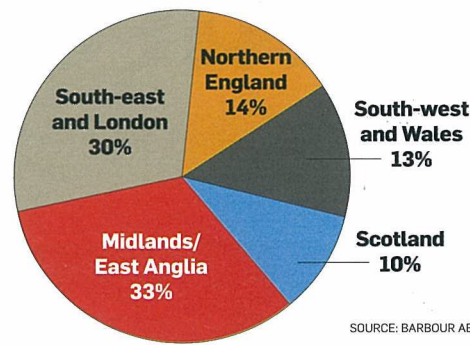


Piercy & Co's design for Derwent's Turnmills building in Farringdon.

HOUSING SECTOR

If the economy is to improve, housing will be at the heart of it. The total level of contracts awarded in the last quarter of 2012 was up 20% to £7.3 billion on Q3. In total, 2012 saw a 6% rise on 2011 figures. The government is hoping the private sector takes up the slack caused by public sector cuts. London and the south-east accounted for more than one-third of private housing contracts in Q4.

Housing work by region in Q4



SOURCE: BARBOUR ABI

NUMBER CRUNCHING

20%

The percentage rise spent on salaries at Purcell, according to its latest results — the first since a staff survey said this was an area that could be improved. With overall pay now up one-fifth to £4.7 million across 172 employees, the average salary is £27,317, up from £24,948 the previous year.

A GOOD WEEK FOR

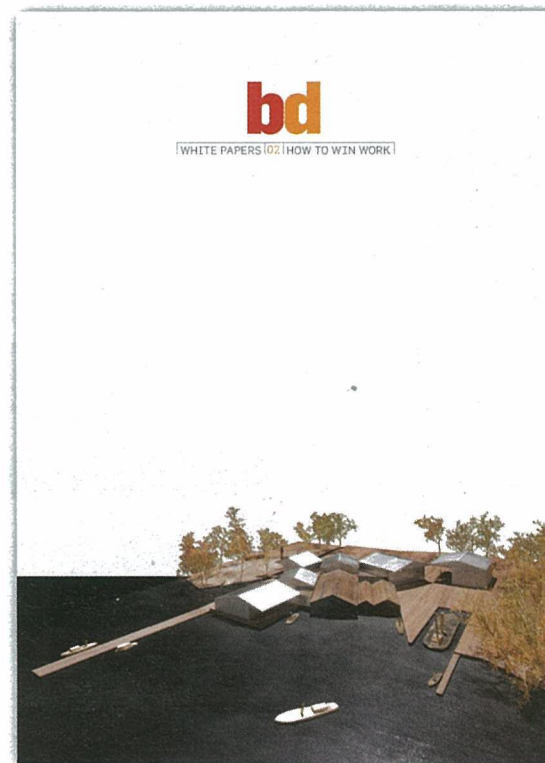
House sales

The number of housing transactions has grown for the fourth month in a row, according to the latest RICS housing market survey. There were 15% more surveyors saying that sales had risen in January, compared with the previous month.

A BAD WEEK FOR

Arup in London

Arup has been ditched as the engineer on Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto's Serpentine Gallery Pavilion in London. The firm has been replaced by Aecom, whose global chief executive for building engineering, David Glover, joined the US giant two years ago after 22 years with Arup.



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